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A FORERUNNER OF THE ADVERTISING AGENT

In these days, when trademarks are from time to time enhanced in value by signed pleasantries from our foremost writers, it is interesting to find evidences that the art of advertising in literary disguise had its place also in the classical background. That most practical of Roman literary men, the epigrammatist Martial, shows us that advertisement-writing was included in the literary career in ancient times, as it evidently is now. Martial's work in several respects resembled the production of a periodical; Friedländer has remarked that such "occasional" poetry as that of Martial and Statius took the place of journalism in Rome; but more than that, Martial's successive books became for some years almost a regular literary annual, making its timely appearance at about the holiday season of the Saturnalia: if they are to be classed as magazines, perhaps their advertising feature is the less surprising. Martial's advertisements are of the sort that newspaper men call "reading-notices." Some of them are obvious and undoubted; others we may fairly suspect which do not so plainly confess their character. The market value of publicity he had the best of reasons for knowing, for much of his livelihood depended upon his accommodation of vanity in this regard, and his unwillingness to supply a literary puff gratuitously appears in his frank assumption that it was a service rendered. "There is a man," he once wrote, "who has been praised in my book and now pretends he doesn't owe me anything. He has imposed upon me."

Other writers of course were rewarded by patrons whom they flattered. We owe to Maecenas some highly respectable examples. But Martial seems to have brought the business down to a most unaristocratic level. Nothing could be plainer than that he aimed to profit by his Muse. His greatest discontent with a literary hit was summed up in the line:

What does that success amount to? My purse doesn't know anything about it (xi. 3. 6).

To a man who once found fault with his work his reply was that, if his readers liked it, he didn't care what the critics thought. "I should prefer," he says, "that the viands at my banquet should please the diners rather than the cooks." Professor Saintsbury has found implicit in this remark a whole critical theory; but I fancy Martial was thinking of the more substantial uses of being a popular author. In an observation upon two other versifiers he wrote: "Gallus and Lupercus sell their poems; now,

Classicus, deny if you can that they are sensible poets," or, as perhaps it should be translated, "that poets are sensible men."¹

The evidences of Martial's desire to contribute to the commercial success of his literary output are not the least interesting parts of his work. They are closely related, moreover, to the question how an author shared, if he shared at all, in the profits of the sale of his book. The publishing business was fairly organized before Martial's day; but in the absence of copyright—though the inference may be made from some of Martial's allusions that an author, by help in the matter of verification and text correction, might give to his authorized publisher an advantage partially resembling copyright—the question whether an author's interest in the business was limited to his reputation, or whether it extended to his pocket also, is one upon which the critics do not agree. No ancient writer has quite satisfactorily explained whether his publisher gave him a royalty, or paid him a lump sum for his manuscript, or simply did not pay him at all. Yet one cannot read the booksellers' advertisements which Martial inserted among his epigrams, without concluding that, however unsatisfactory his share was, he must have had some substantial interest in their financial success.

Co-operation of some kind between author and publisher seems very evident—for instance, in the well-known epigram (ii. 2) which sets forth the convenience of a pocket edition of Martial's book to the reader who wants to take it with him on his travels: "Lest," says the writer, "you should not know where I am for sale, I will direct you," and he does, to the shop of Secundus, behind the temple of Peace. Another epigram (i. 113) refers the reader in search of Martial's earlier poems to Pollius as the bookseller who has them for sale. In another (iv. 72) Martial takes the occasion of replying to someone who has begged him for a presentation copy, to mention that his books can be purchased of Tryphon, the well-known publisher. A would-be borrower is reminded (i. 117) that an easier way to get the book he wants is to buy it of Atrectus, the proprietor of a convenient bookshop near the Forum Transitorium.

Now, for whose benefit were these reading-notices primarily intended? Did the various publishers hire the author outright to put them into the book, or did he do it to increase their sales for the sake of a percentage of his own? The supposition of sheer unremunerated good nature is hardly to be considered in Martial's case. But if in his day the author's payment for a book took regularly the form of a lump sum, evidently an epigram

¹ *Vendunt carmina Gallus et Lupercus.*

Sanos, Classice, nunc nega poetas (xii. 46).

or two like these included in it would loosen the publisher's purse-strings the further.

Book i, however, contains references to three different booksellers. Apparently all three must have combined in their contributions, and in that case what were the relations between Pollius, the publisher of Martial's *Juvenilia*, and the publisher or publishers of the book in which Pollius' advertisement appears? Did Pollius pay Atrectus and Secundus for the privilege of having his "ad." inserted in the volume of which their *librarii* produced the copies? Or was Martial possibly a silent partner in one of these firms?

But, besides the notices of particular booksellers, Martial addressed the reading public with suggestions calculated more impartially to help the sale of his books, which were perhaps, in the language that is familiar to us, "for sale by all dealers." A plagiarist, for instance, is urged at least to buy the volume from which he steals the contents. The first epigram in Book i—which was by no means the first thing Martial published—begins quite in the tone of the salesman: "This is that Martial for whom you are looking, known all over the world for his clever books of epigrams"—a cheerful assurance to a possible purchaser that he has the right book in hand and can confidently buy it.

Not every reference to a publisher, it is true, is calculated to help his business. In one of Martial's early books there is a very peculiar reference to the price of the volume as sold by Tryphon the bookseller. "You can get it," says Martial, "for four *sestertii*; or, if that is too much, you can get it for two, and still Tryphon will make a profit" (*Xen.* 3). This may be a reference to a cut rate on a more "popular" edition, but it sounds like a suggestion from an author with a grievance, that the bookseller's prices might as well be beaten down a little, if the purchaser cares. Somewhat later Martial disavows responsibility for misunderstood poetry which "the *librarius* spoiled" (ii. 8: *Non meus est error; nocuit librarius illis*), with quite the same zest with which a modern victim of typographical errors blames the printer.

It is an interesting fact that in reference to his way of book-advertising as well as to some other matters—among them that more ordinary method of creating a demand for a new book which bored Martial so much, the habit of the author's reading—his attitude visibly changed in the course of his career. The examples I have cited are all from his earlier books. The practice of writing advertisements for publishers he seems later to have given up, either because of a gain in prosperity or of an advancing sense of the dignity of the literary calling.

But we cannot suppose he intentionally omitted any means of securing prestige for himself. The few marks of imperial favor which he received he used as effectively as possible to heighten the impression that his works were in the fashion; much as a British tradesman of whom some court functionary has once made a purchase becomes forever afterward "Furnisher to His Majesty" or "Haberdasher to His Royal Highness," as the case may be. Although, after Domitian died, Martial did not hesitate to save the credit of his own judgment by blandly avowing that his flatteries of his imperial master had been insincere, still while the emperor's value as a bill-board lasted our author had willingly used him in that capacity.

Martial's attitude toward plagiarism changed also in a curious way. It was in the early part of his career especially that he was troubled by other humorists who stole his jokes without giving him credit; later, when the name of Martial was a trademark which gave to a witticism an added value, his annoyance was that inferior wits credited him with jokes which he did not wish to father. The value of his brand he had built up chiefly indeed by the quality of his product, but partly also by insisting upon it, till his name had become a definite asset. Even his old toga, like the familiar stage properties of a "character" actor, had become a part of his stock in trade, which he says (ix. 49) the reader had "learned to know and love." It is hardly too far to push the analogy: modern manufacturers have been known to capitalize the effect of their previous advertising at millions of dollars.

But to return to more specific exploitations of Martial's talent, we need not suppose that he confined his availability as an advertising medium to the uses of the publishing business, though perhaps the indications of any other kind of commercial connection must be taken with somewhat less seriousness. The well-known dealer in cosmetics, however, *Cosmus*, whose name, in spite of the suspicious aptness of its Greek significance, is supposed to be a real one, must certainly have been interested in Martial's frequent allusions to the products of his shop. Not all of them doubtless were quite what the dealer would have written himself. Rather often the humorist found occasion to deride people who made crude uses of perfumery. But publicity is publicity, and the vendor of an article that depended upon the fashion for its sale may well have been willing to pay for apparently casual allusions like

Aut libram petit illa *Cosmiani* (xii. 55),

"the girl asks for a pound of *Cosmus*," and

Cum cogitarem mane quod darem munus,

Utrumne *Cosmi*, *Nicerotis* an libram (xii. 65),

a similar reference to both Cosmus and another ointment-seller. We are reminded of present-day literary references to feminine requirements in the way of boxes of "Huyler's." Such allusions, however justified by familiar facts, must have helped to keep up the tide of trade for Messrs. Cosmus and Niceros.

Martial's books of gift mottoes may easily have furnished him with numerous opportunities of this kind. Modern advertisers frequently offer to relieve our perplexities with suggestions at the gift-making season, and Martial was meeting a similar demand from a gift-making public. But the commercial motives which we suspect beneath some of his neat suggestions of convenient souvenirs for one's friends must evidently for the most part remain matters of conjecture. Even so definite an allusion to a commercial brand as *Caseus Etruscae signatus imagine Lunae* (xiii. 30) seems to have been of local rather than of individual concern, and we doubt whether the local board of trade of Luna, Etruria, had learned how well worth its while it might have been to subsidize the writer of such notices as this. At any rate, the advertising pages of Martial's magazine had not been definitely segregated from the uncontaminated literary text. So when he alludes by name to medical specialists of his time, to dentists, to barbers, and other purveyors to human necessities, we cannot generally tell whether the people he mentions are simply being used as literary material or vicariously making a bid for trade.

There are some references to bathing establishments, for instance, which suggest an inquiry or two. When the poet is publishing an epigrammatic invitation to a friend to dinner, he includes in the most natural way a suggestion that they will bathe together before dining. "You know," he says, "how close the baths of Stephanus are to where I live" (xi. 52). In another place (xiv. 60) he pleasantly refers to these same *balneae* as exceptionally light, all the more noticeably since elsewhere he alludes to the rival establishment of a man named Gryllus as dark and gloomy (i. 59; ii. 14), and to other baths in still other depreciating ways. Whether the kindly references to Stephanus' place were worth anything to Martial, either in money or free privileges, of course we cannot tell.

It would be even more invidious to ask whether the unpleasant references to Stephanus' rivals and to other men similarly affected may possibly have been intended as means for collecting money of a different color. In his satirical sketches Martial made great use of fictitious names, generally, of course, for the most obvious reasons, and once (ii. 23) he even explicitly refused to tell who was a certain "Postumus" whom he mentioned in his book (cf. ix. 95 b). But did he ever threaten, if he were not properly

"seen," to remove the disguise of anonymity from the object of his annoying comment? Libel laws and the like have given us a rather keen sense of the difference between advertising—favorable publicity—and its opposite. But, after all, the acceptance of money for saying something good of a man and the acceptance of money for refraining from saying something evil, are not altogether unrelated subjects. Martial aims to give the reader, particularly in his later books, an impression of his underlying good intentions. In one instance he ostentatiously rebuffs a man who has urged him to attack a special individual. In another place he gives us the pious information that he does not aim at persons at all, but at types of folly and vice. But there is one curiously suggestive proposition made to a plagiarist. He blunders, Martial tells him, in that he steals verses already published. He should buy some of Martial's unpublished material, which could be had for a consideration, and nobody would suspect him. "Whoever seeks a reputation by reciting another man's works ought not to buy the book: he ought to buy the author's silence" (i. 66). Of course, it is a frequent error of judgment to interpret too seriously the jests of a writer like Martial, who was as willing to be witty at his own expense as at that of anyone else; but surely we may plausibly be curious over the implications of a suggestion like this.

The poet, however, repeatedly insists upon his own harmlessness, and we ought perhaps to revert to our original proposition and do no more than set him down as one who was in advance of his time in defining the uses of publicity. "You can't call a man an author when nobody reads him," incidentally he observed of the literary assaults of a rival. And when he quotes the judgment of some critics that Lucan was "no poet," he significantly adds (xiv. 194): "The bookdealer who sells him thinks he is poet enough;" for Lucan seems to have ranked high among "best-sellers." As to the advertising business, it appears to have been simply Martial's misfortune that he was born too long before the days of regular space rates; special terms for repeated insertions he may indeed have offered. Perhaps in spirit he would have been inclined to agree with that facetious modern reviewer who said that the only really professional literary man is the man who writes the advertisements, all others being amateurs.

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